DAWN

METRO South

KARACHI Monday, January 19, 2026

KARACHI

Sunset	06:07pm
Sunrise (Tomorrow)	07:17am

NEXT 24 HRS

Minimum	13℃
Maximum	26℃
Humidity	55%
Outlook	Sunny

Mitchell, Phillips hit tons as NZ beat India to clinch ODI series

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Murad promises probe, assures victims of govt support

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: The Sindh government on Sunday promised a thorough investigation into the deadly fire incident and assured all-out support to the victims.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah visited Gul Plaza where he reviewed rescue and firefighting operations. He also met with affected shopkeepers and families and assured them of his full cooperation.

Talking to the media, he termed the situation extremely worrying as 58 to 60 people are still reported missing and said: "We pray to Allah for their safety and hope they are found alive."

He said the affected building consisted of a basement, ground floor and three storeys, housing more than a thousand shops.

He cautioned against speculating on the cause of the fire, stating that it was too early to draw final conclusions. "Some preliminary reports suggest the fire may have started due to a short circuit in one of the shops," he said.

He said municipal authorities responded immediately and the first fire tender reached the site at 10:27 pm and firefighting began without delay.

He said firefighters faced severe difficulties during the operation due to the building's layout and lack of access points.

Meanwhile, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said in a statement that the government stands in solidarity with the affected families.

He said that as soon as information about the incident was received, government machinery reached the site during the night, and every possible effort was made to control the fire using all available resources.

He said a comprehensive inquiry into the incident is underway to determine how the fire broke out and what caused it. "A fact-finding report will also be prepared, on the basis of which future steps will be decided."

Mr Memon said that after a complete assessment of the damage, the government will decide on the future course of action. "Whether it is the business community or other affected individuals, the government will provide maximum possible support within the framework of law and regulations," he added.

'Delayed govt response' blamed for Gul Plaza catastrophe

Traders say fire could have been contained sooner, but limited resources and delayed action by authorities allowed it to spread unchecked

By Dawar Shoaib

PEOPLE gather on M.A. Jinnah Road as the firefighting goes on. —Shakil Adil / White Star

KARACHI: The terrifying fire that erupted at Gul Plaza on Saturday night could have been contained sooner, but delayed response and limited resources from the authorities allowed the blaze to rage unchecked for hours.

Traders and area residents said that timely action from the Saddar Fire Station, other civic bodies, and local officials could have saved lives and livelihoods, yet the firefighting operation only picked up in full force early Sunday.

Shopkeepers at the site told *Dawn* that if the firefighting team had arrived last night with full force and resources, the scene here would probably look very different.

One shopkeeper pointed out that the Saddar Fire Station is only a few minutes away, yet no timely action was taken.

A local resident said they were repeatedly told on Saturday night that there was a shortage of water, which hampered the operation.

People criticised the Sindh government and the Karachi mayor, questioning where the mayor and provincial ministers were during the crisis. They also highlighted that the condition of M.A. Jinnah Road makes it extremely difficult to position even two water bowsers side by side.

"Had the operation started properly the moment the fire broke out, perhaps so much damage could have been avoided. By morning, everything had been consumed by the flames," one shopkeeper said, looking over the rubble.

"If a proper rescue operation had been in place, people could have been saved, and businesses might have survived. The government doesn't seem to realise that these weren't just shops – thousands of households' livelihoods were at stake," a clothing dealer lamented.

"At first, the smoke kept spreading, and then the fire reached the upper floors. If the teams had arrived on time, perhaps people could have been brought out safely," a young man on the scene recounted.

Atmosphere of fear and mourning

The fire that could still not be fully extinguished by Sunday night has cloaked the bustling M.A. Jinnah Road and Saddar area in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and mourning.

The rising sun, usually seen as a symbol of life and hope, appeared sorrowful this Sunday morning in Karachi. The light that every day awakened new hopes in shops and businesses was silent, as if it too had lowered its gaze after witnessing the blaze and destruction.

Along with traders and the relatives of those who died, even the air around Gul Plaza seemed to be grieving.

Some are searching for their loved ones, while others are consumed by the agony of losing their businesses. Every eye looked wet and every face appeared drained and hopeless.

The same market where shopkeepers raised shutters every morning and the voices of bargaining echoed, today stands as a burning skeleton. Where once crowds of buyers gathered, now victims, relatives, rescue workers and onlookers stand clustered together.

The intensity of the fire has already caused part of the building to collapse.

One glance at the rubble is enough to realise the scale of the devastation. Hundreds of shops have been destroyed.

It is clear that when a building burns, it is not only brick and metal that burn. Livelihoods, trust and the hard labour of years also burn to the ground.

The piles of debris and ash have shattered the economic lives of traders within moments.

'Everything was here'

A middle-aged trader who had been running his business in the building for nearly two decades stood on the road looking at the charred structure on Sunday morning.

After a long silence, he uttered just one sentence: "Everything was here."

In that single sentence lay the struggle, livelihood and hope of an entire life.

Another affected trader broke down while speaking to *Dawn* and pointed toward the burning building. People around him tried to console him, but every heart around seemed to be grieving.

Majid, who owned a children's clothing shop, said he and other shopkeepers had stocked merchandise for the Eid season, but "now everything has turned to ashes."

A dangerous design, an ageing structure

Among the public, there is also a belief that the scale of the fire is tied to the risks that had accumulated over time.

Gul Plaza is among the commercial centres of Karachi built decades ago. Over the years, thousands of shops, warehouses and stockrooms became packed into narrow corridors.

Fabrics, plastics, cardboard cartons, other goods, cramped pathways and substandard wiring created an environment that made today's disaster unbearable.

Traders say that such calamities not only destroy wealth, but also push an entire class to stand once again before time and debt to rebuild what was lost.

Satellite centres of advanced endoscopy institute planned

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday appreciated the role of Sindh Institute of Advanced Endoscopy and Gastroenterology (SIAG) in building local expertise through physician training and announced plans for satellite centres in province's peripheral regions to decentralise patient services and reduce burden on urban hospitals.

He was speaking at the second anniversary celebration of SIAG, which is a part of Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK), organised at the Dow University auditorium.

In just two years, the chief minister pointed out, the institute had emerged as one of the country's most advanced public sector endoscopy centres, offering free, professional services with dignity.

"SIAG embodies the government's vision of accessible, high-quality care for everyone. Excellence in healthcare is a right of the people, not a privilege of the few," the chief minister emphasized, highlighting how the institute bridges the gap between advanced endoscopic technology and public sector services.

He congratulated the SIAG team, Dow University of Health Sciences, the health department, all partners, while reaffirming government's full support to the facility.

"The government broader reforms include upgrading tertiary hospitals, enhancing emergency care, improving maternal and child health, developing specialised centres in cardiology and oncology, ensuring transparent procurement, and strengthening healthcare professional training," he noted.

Man shot dead by robbers in Gadap

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: A man was shot dead by armed robbers on the Superhighway on Sunday evening, police said.

Gadap City police said that 55-year-old Ajmal Khan was shot and killed during a robbery. The incident occurred near the Sindh Solar project.

The body was taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for medico-legal formalities.

Suspect shot dead in 'encounter'

A suspected robber was shot dead in an alleged encounter on main Sharea Faisal on Sunday, police and rescue officials said.

East SSP Zubair Nazir Shaikh said that two robbers snatched cash and other valuables from some passers-by near Karsaz and were fleeing when someone informed policemen present at a picket near Colony Gate about the incident.

He said that the policemen challenged the robbers, who started firing and tried to speed away. In an ensuing exchange of gunfire, one suspect, later identified as Mohammed Soomar, was killed.

He said his accomplice managed to escape in an injured condition.

The police claimed to have recovered an unlicensed pistol from the custody of the killed suspect.

The body was shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre for medico-legal formalities.

Agonising wait for loved ones lost in smoke and stampede

Amid chaos, survivors recount tales of bravery and last text messages

By Shazia Hasan

FAMILIES of the missing victims wait anxiously for the launch of the search operation. —Shakil Adil / White Star

KARACHI: There were puddles and pools of water from the fire tenders front and back roads of Gul Plaza and still the fire that broke out in the well-known shopping centre in the heart of M.A. Jinnah Road on Saturday night could not be put out completely, even until sundown on Sunday.

The building with more than a thousand shops specialising in selling luggage, crockery, decoration items, plastic goods, toys, garments and so much more, was charred black.

"Allah Khair Karey", "Ya Allah Reham", one overheard someone utter here or there as they watched the scene of fire being put out on one side before starting again from there within minutes.

Cousins Mohammed Ramzan and Mohammed Imran stood watching, too, one cousin holding the other close, the horror clearly visible in their eyes as they knew well but did not want to accept what could have happened to their cousin Faisal Ghani who worked at a crockery shop on the second

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A fierce battle between water and fire

By Hassan Belal Zaidi

KARACHI: "There it goes again," the cry rings out. Within seconds, burly firefighters point their hose at the fresh flare up, concentrating a high-pressure stream of water that momentarily douses the leaping flames.

By Sunday afternoon, around 16 hours after the Gul Plaza fire broke out, firefighters are still playing 'whack-a-mole' with the blaze.

They had a massive audience, as M.A. Jinnah Road is teeming with people — rescue personnel and fire fighters, volunteers, city officials, media crews and the general public.

"It was full of plastic products. It'll be burning for days," I overhear one bystander say.

"I hear they shut the [market] gates at 10pm," another chimes in.

"There was a parking lot on the third floor, no telling what has become of that," a third man volunteers.

Many of them are from the neighbourhood, or own businesses nearby. All eyes are on the section of the building that has collapsed, and many an outstretched finger points to a part of the building's façade, where key beams seem to have lost structural integrity and the whole thing looks like it's ready to keel over.

A quick glance at Google Street View shows that the collapsed part of the building housed shops and the entrance to the aforementioned parking area. In

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11th Hyderabad Literature Festival gets underway

Culture Minister Zulfiqar Shah pledges holding of such events at district level

By Mohammad Hussain Khan

HYDERABAD: The 11th edition of the Hyderabad Literature Festival (HLF) with the theme of 'Beauty in Diversity" got underway in a local hotel on Sunday.

Sindh Minister for Culture Zulfiqar Ali Shah was the chief guest at the inaugural session of the two-day event.

The session started with a *wai* of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, followed by his folk tale, *Umer & Marvi*, presented by students; a Gilgiti dance by a group of Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) students; and recital of poetry on Sindh by Afsheen Memon.

Speaking to the audience, Minister Zulfiqar Shah appreciated the organisers for holding the festival in collaboration with his department.

He said the department was planning to organise such cultural activities at district level. He said artisans of different crafts had been connected with market directly by his department after excluding the role of middlemen.

He referred to the World Literature Festival (WLF) held recently in the Arts Council Karachi where 142 countries' representation was seen as against 44 in its previous edition. "These activities present a soft image of Pakistan in world," he said.

Highlighting his department's active role in promoting and protecting Sindh's culture and heritage, the minister mentioned the great efforts it made to win heritage status for Boreendo — an

ancient music instrument belonging to the Indus Valley civilisation — at the relevant Unesco forum in India.

He said the host country denied visa to the culture department's delegation to frustrate the efforts but with Pakistan's High Commission's help, a presentation was given to the Unesco body and Boreendo was placed on the list of its heritage artefacts.

Haris Khalique, the keynote speaker, urged poets, intellectuals and writers to connect all segments of society. He said: "While adhering to the assets of our respective civilisations, we have to promote friendly voices as it ensures survival [of our culture]". This would also help ensure protection of core interests, he added.

Inamullah Shaikh, a former Sindh University teacher, observed that cultural activities were witnessing a boom in the form of literary and musical events.

"We need to become part of international cultural activities to ensure survival of Sindh's culture while adopting modern means for preserving it," he said, and stressed that every member of society should play his/her role in this regard.

Dr Tehmina Mufti, an author, said that youth should be educated about Sindh's past dynasties, including Samma, Soomra, Kalhora and Talpur.

Hyderabad Commissioner Fayyaz Abbasi said that diversity was very much important for a society. He said that HLF's theme was quite appropriate. He was delighted to see students from Gilgit performing and getting applause from the audience.

Lifetime achievement awards were presented to Naseer Mirza, Afzal Ahmed Syed, Wusatullah Khan, Humera Channa, Sakina Samoo and Samina Ahmed.

HLF host Izhar Soomro pointed out that a safe environment for women was ensured at the event. He announced that future HLF editions would also be held at same venue.

AN artist performs at the festival. —Dawn